VII

V. 2. 27.

King JOHN and the ABBOT of Canterbury.

~~To the Tune of, The King and Lord Abbot.~~

Note. As the Use of these Old Songs is very great, in respect that many Children who never would have learn'd to Read, had not they took a Delight in poring over Jane Shore or Robin Hood, &c. which has insensibly stole into them a Curiosity and Desire of Reading other the like Stories, till they have improv'd themselves more in a short time than perhaps they would have done in some Years at School: In order still to make them more useful, I premise to affix an Introduction, *in which I shall point out what is Fact and what is Fiction in each Song; which will (as may be readily suppos'd) give not only Children, but persons of more ripe Years an Insight into the Reality Intent and Design, as well as many times the Author and Time when such Song was made, which has not hitherto been explain'd.*

†††John, *the Son of* Henry II. *succeeded his Brother* Richard I. *in the Year* 1199. *He is recorded as a very cruel and unjust Prince. To the Clergy he was an inveterate Foe; for he seiz'd their Lands and Revenues, put many to Death, and forced the rest to fly; for which reason he was excommunicated by the Pope, and the whole Kingdom interdicted for several Years. This Prince after a turbulent and unhappy Reign of near Eighteen Years and a half died with Grief, of having in a Moral's lost his Baggage and Part of his Army; or as others tell us, of a Surfeit of new Ale and Peaches. I have heard Criticks object to this Ballad, that the Poet had no strict Regard to the Character of his Personages, but had made them all inconsistent with themselves. King* John, *they say, was a Prince of that Temper, that when he had taken a Mind to any Man's Estate (especially a Churchman's, for those he frequently seized) he would not have stood dallying three Days with him, or have let him go scot-free at Last for the best Jest in the World, or though he could have answered Questions like an Oracle. And indeed this Ballad was not written originally on King* John, *but taken from one much older, entitled,* The Old Abbot and King Oliver. *Why this Oliver was I cannot positively say, but by the Affinity of the Name, I suppose* Offa *a Saxon King was meant, if our Poet had any Meaning; for no body I believe will be credulous enough to think the Song founded on a Fact; and probably some succeeding Poet being at a Loss about* Oliver, *thought King* John *the properest Person to fix the Story upon, as one who had made nothing of seizing Churchmen's Lands.*

I'LL tell you a Story, a Story anon,
Of a noble Prince, and his Name was K. *John*;
For he was a Prince, and a Prince of great might,
He held up great wrongs, and he put down great right.
Derry down, down, hey derry down.

I'll tell you a Story, a Story so merry,
Concerning the Abbot of *Canterbury*;
And of his House-keeping and high Renown,
Which made him repair to fair *London* Town.
Derry down, &c.

How now Brother Abbot! 'Tis told unto me,
That thou keepest a far better House than I;
And for thy House-keeping and high Renown,
I fear thou hast Treason against my Crown.
Derry down, &c.

I hope, my Liege, that you owe me no grudge,
For spending of my true gotten Goods.
If thou dost not answer me Questions three,
Thy Head shall be taken from thy Body.
Derry down, &c.

When I am set so high on my Steed,
With my Crown of Gold upon my Head,
Amongst all my Nobility with joy and much mirth,
Thou must tell me to one Penny what I am worth.
Derry down, &c.

At the next Question you must not flout,
How long shall I be riding the World about?
At the third Question thou must not shrink,
But tell to me truly what I do think?
Derry down, &c.

O these are hard Questions for my shallow Wit,
For I cannot answer your Grace as yet;
But if you will give me but three Days Space,
I will do my Endeavour to answer your Grace:
Derry down, &c.

O three Days Space I will thee give,
And that is the longest Day thou hast to live;
And if thou dost not answer these Questions right,
Thy Head shall be taken from thy Body quite.
Derry down, &c.

And as the Shepherd was going to the Fold,
He 'spy'd the old Abbot come riding along:
How now Master Abbot! You are welcome home,
What News have you brought from good K *John*?
Derry down, &c.

Sad News, Sad News I have thee to give,
For I have but three Days Space for to live;
If I do not answer him Questions three,
My Head will be taken from my Body.
Derry down, &c.

When he is set so high on his Steed,
With his Crown of Gold upon his Head,
Amongst all his Nobility with joy and much mirth,
I must tell him to one Penny what he is worth.
Derry down, &c.

At the next Question I must not flout,
How long he shall be riding the World about:
At the third Question I must not shrink,
But tell to him truly what he does think.
Derry down, &c.

O Master, did you never hear it yet,
That a Fool may learn a wise Man Wit:
Lend me but your Horse and your Apparel,
I'll ride to fair *London* and answer the Quarrel.
Derry down, &c.

Now I am set so high on my Steed,
With my Crown of Gold upon my Head,
Amongst all my Nobility with joy and much mirth,
Now tell me to one Penny what I am worth.
Derry down, &c.

For Thirty Pence our Saviour was sold
Amongst the false *Jews*, as you have been told;
And Nine and Twenty's the Worth of thee,
For I think thou art one Penny worse than he.
Derry down, &c.

At the next Question thou may'st not flout,
How long I shall be riding the World about:
You must rise with the Sun and ride with the same,
Until the next Morning he rises again;
Derry down, &c.

And then I am sure you'll make no Doubt,
But in Twenty-four Hours you'll ride it about.
At the third Question thou must not shrink,
But tell to me truly what I do think.
Derry down, &c.

All that I can do, & 'twill make your heart merry
For you think that I'm the Abbot of *Canterbury*;
But I'm his poor Shepherd, as you may see,
And am come to beg Pardon for he and for me.
Derry down, &c.

The King he turn'd him about and did smile,
Saying, Thou shalt be Abbot the other while:
O no, my Grace, there is no such Need,
For I can neither write nor read.
Derry down, &c,

Then Four Pounds a Week will I give unto thee,
For this merry true Jest thou hast told unto me,
And tell the old Abbot when thou comest home,
Thou hast brought him a Pardon from good K *John*.
Derry down, &c.

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